



Sen. Joyce Mulliken's UPDATE FROM OLYMPIA 2/6/04

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Committee Assignments

Land Use & Planning (Chair)
Highways & Transportation
Commerce & Trade
Natural Resources, Energy
& Water (Ex officio member)

DID YOU KNOW?

Nearly 80 percent of doctors say they order unnecessary tests and 74 percent say they make unnecessary referrals to specialists to ward off lawsuits. (*Trial Lawyers Association*)

In medical malpractice cases, trial lawyers often take between 40 percent and 70 percent of the award in fees and cost. (*Trial Lawyers Association*)

Join my 13th District House colleagues and me every Tuesday morning at 9:00 am on KBSN, 1470 AM in Moses Lake. I encourage you to tune in and learn more about what's happening in Olympia. You can even call the show and ask questions on the air!

Dear Friends,

In order to keep things moving along throughout the legislative process, deadlines are established to ensure that procrastination doesn't rule the day. This week was the last week for Senate committees to consider Senate bills (ditto in the House for House bills), with the exception of budget-related and transportation bills.

What does that mean? Simply put, if a Senate bill hasn't made it through a Senate committee by now, it is considered dead (again, ditto in the House for House bills). While no bill is really "dead" until the Legislature has gone home, the parliamentary procedures required to consider a bill that hasn't made it past the deadline are quite lengthy and complicated.

One of the bills I introduced this session came from a Moses Lake constituent. SB 6487 creates minimum standards for renewable fuels – like biodiesel and ethanol – in the future production and selling of fuel for combustion engines in Washington state.

Biodiesel is a nonpetroleum fuel produced from renewable sources such as vegetable oils, animal fats, and recycled cooking oils. It can be blended at any percentage with petroleum diesel.

The bill requires that all fuel sold in the state must contain minimum amounts of renewable biodiesel fuel beginning in 2006. This will be good for agriculture and the environment and it reduces our dependency on fossil fuels. We can also stimulate the local economy and create entrepreneurial opportunities with this new industry.

While it looks like the bill may not make it this year, I think it is an interesting and worthwhile endeavor. I would like to see more money going into the pockets of local companies rather than a continued stream of dollars flowing overseas to the Middle East.

Those of you that have received my updates before know about my support of tort reform and issue of capping so-called "pain and suffering damages" in medical malpractice lawsuits. With no end to the million-dollar lawsuits that fatten the wallets of trial attorneys – who often receive as much as 70 percent of the award in attorneys' fees – medical malpractice insurance rates continue to skyrocket. Because of this, doctors and OB-GYNs are leaving the state at an alarming rate.

Opponents of the proposed \$250,000 cap on pain and suffering damages say that the cap will not result in lower insurance premiums for medical professional. However, Physicians Insurance, Washington's largest insurer of doctors, today pledged to cut insurance rates by 10 percent if the Legislature – and the voters, as is required to change Washington's Constitution – approve of the cap.

This is very good news for our doctors, especially in our rural counties. Again, I'll keep you informed of this issue throughout the remainder of the 2004 Legislature.

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Sen. Joyce Mulliken, 13th Legislative District